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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000387

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [PHUM](#) [CE](#) [NO](#) [JA](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: Recent peace process-related meetings involving LTTE help a bit in improving atmosphere

Refs: Colombo 374, and previous

(U) Classified by Lewis Amselem, Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons 1.5 (b, d).

[11.](#) (C) SUMMARY: After a March 5 meeting with the Norwegian-led monitors, the Tamil Tigers released two security force personnel from detention. In an earlier meeting with UNICEF, the Tigers agreed to move forward with an "action plan" aimed at ending the use of child soldiers. In other news, the monitors have a new chief, Trygve Tellefsen, a retired Norwegian general. Amid the recent concerns about the state of the GSL's peace initiative, the latest meetings with the Tigers have helped a bit in confidence-building. END SUMMARY.

[12.](#) (SBU) RELEASE OF SECURITY FORCE PERSONNEL: Recent peace process-related meetings involving the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have proven relatively constructive. In a March 5 meeting in the LTTE-controlled Wanni region, for example, officials of the Norwegian-run Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) strongly urged LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran and chief negotiator Anton Balasingham to release a GSL soldier and policeman from custody. (Note: The two security force personnel had been captured in separate incidents and held for some weeks. The LTTE had promised to free them on several occasions.) Hours after the meeting concluded, the Tigers released the two men. In announcing their release, the Tigers stated that the move was a "goodwill gesture to the SLMM, a recognition of SLMM authority, and a sign of dedication to the (February 2002) ceasefire agreement and the peace process."

[13.](#) (C) The holding of the two men by the LTTE had been a cause celebre, with the anti-peace process press in the south loudly demanding their release. The announcement that the men had been freed elicited some positive press for the government's peace initiative. Jehan Perera of the National Peace Council, a local NGO, told us that he thought the move was "quite constructive" in that it indicated some respect on the part of the Tigers for the SLMM's mandate. (Note: The LTTE's willingness to work closely with the SLMM had been subject to serious question of late, especially when SLMM monitors were forced to jump off an arms-smuggling boat, which had been set on fire by Tiger personnel during a February incident. The Tiger personnel subsequently blew themselves up and the boat sank.)

[14.](#) (SBU) MEETING RE CHILD SOLDIERS: In another meeting that wrapped up in seemingly positive fashion, representatives of UNICEF met with LTTE political chief S.P. Thamilselvam on March 4 in the Wanni. At the conclusion of the meeting, the Tigers agreed to finish work on an "action plan" focused on ending the use of child soldiers. The Tigers also agreed to send personnel to workshops and training sessions on the issue in coming weeks. UNICEF and the Tigers also agreed to establish "transit centers" to facilitate the return to society of children released from LTTE ranks. At the close of the meeting, Thamilselvam was quoted as stating the following:

"Our commitment to all children affected by war and not to recruit children has been firm and remains firm. The LTTE has informed all military commanders and heads of political sections in writing regarding the policy not to recruit children under the age of 18."

[15.](#) (C) UNICEF seemed very enthusiastic about the outcome of the meeting. UNICEF assistant program officer Sarah Lendon told us that the meeting was held in a very cordial atmosphere, with the Tigers seeming to want to cooperate fully. She noted that the meeting had resulted in a bit of a "breakthrough" in that for the first time the LTTE had agreed to "concrete measures" (e.g., agreeing to workshops, setting up transit centers) to deal with the child soldier issue. Lendon

acknowledged that the Tigers had made promises to reform their behavior in this area before and had failed to carry through on them.

16. (U) NEW HEAD OF SLMM: In other peace process-related news, the SLMM has a new chief. On March 7, Tryggve Tellefsen, a retired Norwegian army major general, took over as SLMM head of mission. Tellefsen replaces Trond Furuhovde, another retired Norwegian general, who had served as chief of the SLMM since the group began operations last year. As with Furuhovde, Tellefsen is quite experienced in peacekeeping missions: He served as commander of the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) monitoring the Egypt/Israel peace treaty from 1997-2001 and in Macedonia with UNPROFOR from 1994-95.

17. (C) COMMENT: As reviewed in Reftels, there has been a sour mood surrounding the peace process of late, with many in the south -- and the international community -- deeply worried about the LTTE and its commitment to peace. Against this backdrop, the latest meetings with the Tigers have helped a bit in confidence-building. It seems possible that this somewhat more constructive trend on the part of the Tigers could ease the situation a bit as the parties prepare for the next main event, i.e., the sixth round of GSL-LTTE talks, which is scheduled to take place March 18-21 in Japan. END COMMENT.

18. (U) Minimize considered.

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